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NSC BRIEFING

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25 OCTOBER 1956

FRENCH COUP IN NORTH AFRICA

*from Tunis fighting
de op details (both
in "short" one)*

1. France's 22 October coup, the ^{seizure} kidnapping of five Algerian nationalist leaders, although acclaimed at home, has sharply worsened the French position throughout North Africa and has diminished the prospects for a political settlement in Algeria.

The five Algerians leaders were flying from Rabat via the Balearic Islands to Tunis, following a conference with the Sultan of Morocco, in a plane chartered by the sultan from the principal Moroccan airlines. En route from Palma the plane--flown by a French crew--was diverted to Algiers by order of French officials.

Two of the five Algerians are the revolt's ranking leaders-in-exile--Mohamed ben Bella, allegedly chief-of-staff of the rebellion, and Mohamed Khider, a top political leader. The other three were less prominent exiles, among them the rebel's representative in the US, Hussein Ait Ahmed.

Documents seized with the Algerians, as well as evidence supplied by Ben Bella--who is said to be talking freely--are claimed by the French to provide them with the full story of the organization of the Algerian rebellion. The French claim that the sultan of Morocco, in particular, and Tunisian Premier Bourghiba are deeply involved. Some well-known French politicians, and the Egyptian government, are also said to be incriminated. Some private American involvement is also claimed, but a French official in Paris states that this involvement is minor.

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2. The abduction disrupted ~~plans for~~ ^{the} a 2³ October conference between the Moroccan sultan and Tunisian premier Bourghiba, at which the two had planned to coordinate their efforts to effect an Algerian settlement. The meeting was greatly abbreviated, and ended with a joint demand that the Algerians be released.

Both the Tunisian and Moroccan governments have denounced the capture as international piracy. The ~~Tunisian~~ ^{AND MOROCCAN} Ambassadors to Paris ~~have~~ ¹ been recalled. Both governments have asked the US to intervene with France, and approaches have also been made to Britain and Spain.

Council has asked Secretary General
The Arab League ~~is reported to be conferring on the matter~~
Hamarskjold to bring the French action to the attention of
~~and the Arab-Asian bloc at the UN has issued a communique denouncing~~
the UN Security Council.
~~the French action as "high-handed". Press reports state that the~~
AT THE UN
Arab-Asian bloc ^{also} ~~has~~ ⁹ appealed to ~~Secretary General Dag~~ Hamarskjold to intervene.

3. Popular reaction to the abduction in both Tunisia and Morocco has been violent. Some 60 persons--mainly French--are reported dead in Morocco. Tunisian demonstrations thusfar have not involved bloodshed.

General strikes have been called in both countries, however, and a 24-hour strike in all ~~Muslim~~ ^{Arab} countries has reportedly been called for 28 October. The strength of this popular reaction may force both the sultan and Bourghiba to revise their generally moderate pro-French policies to meet the demands of anti-French extremists.

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4. While no rebel activity in Algeria can yet be attributed directly to response to the capture of the five leaders-in-exile, the situation there is almost certainly bound to worsen. The formerly diverse rebel commands in Algeria have reportedly been unified under guerrilla leader Mustapha ben Boulaid. The French action is expected to disrupt cease-fire talks in Algeria, which reportedly were planned for late October between Ben Boulaid and a high French official in Algiers.

The dominant Algerian in exile is now Tewfik el-Madani, in Cairo, who by pre-arrangement succeeds Ben Bella. However, El-Madani does not command the personal authority held by Ben Bella.

The Algerian rebels will continue to follow their plan to send Ferhat Abbas, now in South America, to represent them at the UN and their plan ~~for~~ ^{to} form an Algerian government-in-exile.

French settlers in Algeria greeted the news of the capture with jubilation. Liberal elements, however, question whether the immediate advantage is not outweighed by the reaction in the Moslem world and the martyr's status now conferred on the five. Algerian Moslem moderates believe the arrest will inevitably strengthen overall North African opposition to France.

5. The Mollet government, while standing firm on the propriety of the seizure, is concerned over the effect the incident may have on France's position in Morocco and Tunisia. Mollet has reaffirmed France's intention to continue the pacification effort in Algeria, but does not appear to have dropped his reported plan to present the UN a "declaration of intent" on Algeria's future status.

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In the National Assembly, all non-Communist deputies have indicated enthusiastic support for the seizure. French departmental officials have reported that the action was popularly hailed and that the government's public standing is better than ever.

There are signs of disagreement within the Mollet cabinet.

~~Although we do not have official confirmation, it is believed~~

~~that~~ Undersecretary of State for Moroccan and Tunisian Affairs,

Alain Savary, has resigned because ^{the seizure was effected over} ~~he was not informed of the~~
^{his objections} ~~seizure plan.~~ The French Ambassador to Tunisia, Pierre de Leusse, is also said to have resigned.

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